



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

## *Promoting Creativity for Student-Directed Learning*

Faced with the opportunity of teaching a literature survey course that spanned readings from the Old Testament through Shakespeare, I realized that covering that material in a swiftly moving, six-week session could prove to be a daunting experience for both instructor and students. So I began mapping out a course that would rely heavily upon students taking charge of their own learning, that would be self-intensive, and that would allow the students some creativity options. I also realized that the course must not "burn out" students but, rather, must be a spur to future reading.

First I needed a broad overview; I settled on Norman Steinaker and M. Robert Bell's experiential taxonomy, using its sequence of steps: exposure, participation, identification, internalization, and dissemination.

The exposure, as an overview, came the first day when I introduced the syllabus. Subsequent exposures were enacted when I set up each of the three units; briefer exposure occurred when I set up each author.

The participation would take the form of small group work which allowed students to both examine an issue and to begin developing a trust and rapport with each other—another essential for this class.

Using critical guidelines that I introduced both early in the sessions and periodically throughout the readings, the students began to use the critical strategies to evaluate the literature and then to personalize those evaluations by drawing comparisons to current society.

These comparisons helped them to internalize the literature and began the process of making their motivation more intrinsic than extrinsic.

Finally, the process of dissemination would manifest itself in class discussions, papers, quizzes, and a craft option. The experiential taxonomy represented the overview; now I had to develop the concrete particulars.

Each unit of the course was precisely laid out (although we later had to review the plan to accommodate extended discussions). The first unit would cover samplings of Biblical pieces, Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Petronius, and Augustine. The second unit would lead us through "Song of Roland" and Dante. The third unit would contain

Erasmus, Castiglione, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. The *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, Vol. I, would serve as our text. I then added such details as a midterm, a final exam, weekly quizzes, and a component in which each student would lead the discussion for 20 minutes (discussions pertaining to the literature in the second half of the course).

### The Critical Component

I recognized, as well, that these students would be excited about different readings, and I knew I needed a way to "tap" into that excitement. I decided that a crafts component would be able to do that. In the syllabus, then, each student would read a short critical paper, due early in the course. Instead of a second critical paper, due at course end, a student could opt to create some project. Those adept at writing might want to draft a satire or tell a story using the same style as a writer we had discussed. Others might want to draw, paint, sculpt, build, knit, or videotape. Others might want to use music in some manner to add depth to a reading. The students were free to interpret in any medium they selected, so long as they chose a reading from the text.

I felt the crafts component would intensify a student's reading. Each student would become aware of the overview of each text in the class; but each would then undertake a more studied, interpretative approach to specific passages—and that more studied approach would serve to highlight the entire text.

The interpretative component created much discussion out of class. Students congregated in the student lounge to discuss projects, to share impressions of passages and entire pieces. As a result, this discussion out of class inspired the in-class discussion. Students began using the text to support their interpretations, which were studied not from just a reader's point of view, but from a creator's—or at least, a re-creator's. The dissemination process, spurred by a chance to create, evidenced itself in several areas. Class test scores rose 23%. Normally quiet students began participating in all class discussions. The excitement of the students was carried into the halls after class.



At the final regular class meeting, each student introduced his or her project, explaining how the project was conceived and brought to completion. Student time spent on making the projects averaged between 18 and 20 hours, time which does not take into account the conceiving of the idea, the re-reading of passages, the additional research, and the gathering of materials.

Projects included a replica of the shield of Aeneas; an original music score combining a synthesizer, trumpet, and piano for a Biblical psalm; a cross-stitched banner interpreting elements of the Creation; two paintings illustrating the battle between Achilles and Hector and the death of Hector; an original poem that underscored the importance of dreams or dream-like visions within the scope of the course; a poster depicting and naming each piece in a full suit of armor; a cross-stitchery piece set within a handmade frame; and a watercolor set within a two-level matting.

These projects were then exhibited in the college's library and were appropriately tagged and titled. The local television station videotaped the exhibits a week later, using the music score as background for the report.

#### Evaluation

The success of this course, focused as it was on dissemination and creativity, was brought home to me through a conversation I had with a student's mother.

She related that her son had never been much of a reader before the course but had begun to be a voracious reader of both primary and secondary texts.

What I learned from those course performances and subsequent post-course interviews was invaluable. Instructors may be surprised by the amount of intrinsic motivation generated when a course allows students freedom to research, create, and disseminate. Students feel more in charge of their own learning and feel comfortable with a format that allows them the opportunity to "show off" that learning in a creative fashion.

Instructors may want to determine in what ways they can make their classes more student-dissemination-oriented rather than lecturer-based. Small groups, student-led discussions, and open-ended options—such as the crafts option—will produce more students willing to explore and to create. Classes will move at a faster, more enlightening pace. Discussions will become more intensive, more reflective, and more encompassing. As well, test scores will reflect student success. A dissemination-oriented class also enlivens the instructor!

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We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Susan Burneson  
Associate Director, NISOD  
Editor, *Linkages*

SuAnne D. Roueche, Editor

February 2, 1990, Vol. XII, No. 3  
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INNOVATION ABSTRACTS is a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), EDB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, (512) 471-7545. Subscriptions are available to nonconcurrent members for \$40 per year. Funding in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation. Issued weekly when classes are in session during fall and spring terms and once during the summer. ISSN 0199-106X.